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The NATO Summit at Istanbul, 2004

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The NATO Summit at Istanbul, 2004

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Summary

The NATO allies discussed such issues as Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Balkans at their summit in June 2004. Improved capabilities were a theme touching on a range of issues. The summit occurred at a moment when there is discontent in the alliance over the Bush Administration's handling of Iraq. This report may be updated. See also CRS Report RL32342, *NATO and the European Union*, by Kristin Archick and Paul Gallis.

Background

NATO held a summit in Istanbul, Turkey, June 28-29, 2004. The Bush Administration has emphasized such issues as developing new missions and capabilities to combat terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). However, Iraq's future and Afghanistan dominated the meetings. Some allies are critical of U.S. leadership in Iraq. Most allies believe that the stabilization of Afghanistan is the alliance's key task. Other issues of note under discussion were new capabilities; NATO's role in the Balkans; and possible future enlargement of the alliance.

Iraq

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent efforts to stabilize that country have caused great controversy in the alliance. In February 2003, shortly before the war, France, Germany, and Belgium attempted to block U.S. efforts to provide allied defensive assistance to Turkey because they contended that such assistance would be tantamount to acknowledgment that war was necessary and imminent. The conflict and ensuing failure to locate WMD sharpened a debate among the allies over the degree to which international institutions, such as the U.N., should be relied upon for political measures, such as inspections, before resorting to the use of force.

NATO's current involvement in Iraq is minimal. The alliance provides logistical and communications assistance to Poland, which leads military stabilization efforts in part of the country. Sixteen of NATO's 26 members provide forces to the U.S.-led Multinational Force, but these forces, with the exception of those from Britain, Italy and Poland, are small in number.

Some U.S. officials had raised the possibility of a NATO mission in Iraq following the transfer of sovereignty in June 2004. Given the degree of allied resistance, however, President Bush did not ask the allies to provide more troops in Iraq. In response to a request from the Iraqi interim government, NATO did agree to assist in training Iraq's security forces. France and Germany opposed any effort to train the forces in Iraq; the forces may be trained, therefore, on NATO member states' territories. The allies could not agree upon a timetable for training.¹

In allied countries, for the most part, public opinion opposes involvement of national forces in Iraq. Polish officials have expressed a wish to have NATO take over Poland's sector by early 2005 in order to allow Warsaw to withdraw some of its forces. Approximately 60% of the Polish people oppose their country's involvement there. Spanish forces, serving under Polish command, were withdrawn in May 2004 after a new government took power. In Britain, Prime Minister Tony Blair's public support has plunged over his handling of Iraq issues.²

Several factors account for these reactions. Some governments believe that the Bush Administration went to war precipitously, without waiting for the results of U.N. weapons inspections. They predicted that the move would diminish rather than enhance international security. The handling of prisoners by U.S. forces at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, in apparent violation of international conventions, has led to sharp criticism in the European press and condemnation by some European governments. The Administration's defense of some interrogation methods at Guantanamo and in Iraq has also elicited criticism. Some officials also state that they do not wish their government to take measures that might be seen as assisting in the re-election of President Bush.³

Afghanistan⁴

NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer has said that the stabilization of Afghanistan is NATO's current primary mission. NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operates in Kabul and the province of Kunduz. Its mission is to bring stability to Afghanistan. It is NATO's first "out-of-area" mission beyond Europe, and allied governments have described it as evidence of NATO's determination to fight terrorism. ISAF draws approximately 6,500 troops from 31 countries; overwhelmingly, however, the forces are from NATO's 26 member states, above all from Germany, Canada, Britain, France, and the Netherlands. U.S. forces in ISAF are minimal.

A separate military operation in Afghanistan is "Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)," not under NATO auspices. This force numbers some 14,000 troops, largely U.S.,

¹ "Alliance to Support Iraq with Troop Training," NATO, Brussels, June 29, 2004.

² Interviews with officials from allied governments, April-June 2004; CRS Report RS21794, *Iraq Coalition: Public Opinion Indicators in Selected European Countries*, by Julie Kim.

³ Martin Wolf, "The Savior of Democracy Is Run by a Unilateral Bully," *Financial Times* (FT), May 27, 2004, p. 13; "Torture: Bush et Rumsfeld Face à Une Affaire d'Etat," *Le Monde*, May 11, 2004, p. 1; interviews with officials of allied governments, May-June 2004.

⁴ See also CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

and is led by the United States. The force is active primarily in the eastern part of the country where it is attempting to eliminate Taliban and al Qaeda remnants. France, Norway, Italy, and several other allies are supplying special forces that work with U.S. troops. While some U.S. officials have raised the possibility of merging ISAF and the OEF, the German government and possibly others do not wish to merge a stabilization mission with a combat operation.

NATO has worked to extend ISAF's reach in Afghanistan. Warlords are re-exerting authority in parts of the country. Afghanistan is to hold presidential and parliamentary elections in September 2004 (postponed from June due to instability). In concert with the Afghan government, NATO is attempting to establish Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), composed of soldiers and civil affairs officers. The objective of the PRTs is to extend the reach of the central government, provide security, and undertake projects (such as infrastructure development) that would boost the Afghan economy.

NATO had hoped to establish 5 PRTs by the Istanbul summit, and as many as 18 by the end of 2004. However, only one was established by the summit. Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer has been critical of allies that have promised to develop PRTs but that have not supplied the forces and equipment pledged. Some PRTs have only elements of the necessary force in place. A key element lacking is quick response combat and medical units that could assist PRTs that find themselves in danger.⁵ NATO now hopes to establish the 5 PRT's by September 2004. The future of the additional 13 PRT's is in doubt. The alliance intends at least temporarily to increase the size of ISAF to 10,000 in September in an effort to supply added stability for the elections.

Some Members of Congress who follow NATO closely are critical of allied efforts in Afghanistan. Representative Doug Bereuter has warned that the alliance faces a danger of failure there. In June 2004, he said that NATO has never met a force goal in Afghanistan. He has asserted that there are 1100 infantry companies, 2,000 helicopters, and 300 transport aircraft in European allied militaries, yet for Afghanistan the allies have not provided the several infantry companies, helicopters, and transport aircraft necessary to fulfil ISAF's mission. Mr. Bereuter has called the inability thus far to accomplish the mission "a failure of political will, pure and simple" that "jeopardizes the very credibility of the alliance."⁶

Capabilities

The difficulties encountered in strengthening ISAF illustrate NATO's deficiencies in capabilities. U.S. Marine General James Jones, now NATO's SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe), has repeatedly called on the allies to build forces that are lighter and more "deployable," a central theme of the NATO Prague summit in 2002. During the Cold War, NATO built heavy forces meant to combat a Soviet threat in Europe. Now, with terrorism and proliferation the alliance's principal concerns and out-of-area responsibilities firmly established, the alliance is seeking to build forces that are

⁵ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, "Projecting Stability," speech. Brussels, NATO. May 17, 2004; interviews with U.S. officials, May-June 2004.

⁶ Doug Bereuter, Address to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, June 1, 2004, Bratislava.

light and mobile. Today, only the United States, Britain, and France have combat forces able to deploy long distances and sustain themselves for extended periods of time.

At Prague, the Bush Administration urged the allies to adopt two initiatives meant to increase deployability.⁷ The Administration described the initiatives as a test to revitalize the alliance. One initiative, the NATO Response Force (NRF), is on schedule. The allies wish to develop a force of 21,000 troops maintained in high-readiness status, for high-intensity conflict, and able to reach its destination within 7-30 days of a NATO decision to use it. The NRF is an “insertion force,” designed to manage a conflict until a larger allied force can arrive. The force now has 6,500 troops, primarily European, and is to be fully operational in 2006.

The other key initiative at the 2002 summit was the “Prague Capabilities Commitment” (PCC). The PCC succeeded an earlier capabilities initiative deemed to have had too many unrealistic goals. The PCC is a slimmed down version, with 8 capability goals targeting the allies’ principal deficiencies. The capabilities include strategic lift (air and sea), aerial refueling, precision-guided munitions, secure communications, ground surveillance systems, and special forces. At Istanbul, NATO announced that a Chemical/Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear defense battalion has become fully operational, fulfilling one of the capability goals. However, there remain serious shortfalls in aerial refuelers and in strategic lift, where PCC goals are unlikely to be met on schedule. Some governments, such as the German government, have pleaded that competing budget necessities, such as pension programs, are forestalling plans to modernize their militaries. The German parliament has also reduced and capped defense expenditures for the next several years.⁸

In the view of some observers, these shortfalls underscore the absence of political will in some allied governments to meet force goals that were recently pledged. Repercussions of these shortfalls include difficulty in meeting commitments already made, such as sending forces to Afghanistan. The allies have identified Afghanistan as their first priority; even if more European allies wished to send forces to Iraq, the ability to deploy combat forces to assist in stabilizing that country would be lacking. De Hoop Scheffer has proposed that NATO discuss a possible reform in financing missions. NATO has few jointly held combat assets. One such asset is the AWACs (an aerial early warning and reconnaissance platform). De Hoop Scheffer has proposed that, rather than pursue the current practice of each country paying for its own forces deployed to a theater, NATO purchase more joint assets that might be assigned by the alliance as a whole for an operation. Were this practice to be followed, then all allies contributing to the development of equipment (and possibly units) would share in the cost.⁹

⁷ CRS Report RS21354, *The NATO Summit at Prague*, by Paul Gallis; and CRS Report RS21659, *NATO's Prague Capabilities Commitment*, by Carl Ek.

⁸ “Defense Policy Guidelines,” German Ministry of Defense, Berlin, May 21, 2003. “Defense Overhaul Sets New Focus for Germany,” *FT*, Jan. 14, 2004, p. 2.

⁹ “NATO Chief Seeks to Turn Alliance’s Weaknesses into a Chance to Broker Fundamental Reform,” *FT*, May 27, 2004, p. 4.

The Balkans

NATO has had peacekeepers in Bosnia since 1995. The initial Implementation Force (IFOR) there numbered 60,000. As Bosnia stabilized, NATO reduced the force, ultimately called SFOR (Stabilization Force), to 7,000 troops (June 2004). At the summit, NATO announced that SFOR would end its mission by the end of 2004. At that point, the EU will deploy a military police force to provide stability. NATO will retain a small headquarters in Sarajevo, physically near an EU headquarters so that NATO and the EU might work closely together.¹⁰ NATO will continue to assist in Bosnian defense reform and will also continue the search for war criminals.

NATO also has a stabilization force, KFOR, in Kosovo. Originally numbering 50,000 troops in 1999, KFOR now has a lower limit of 17,500, with no reductions in the foreseeable future likely, given recent violence in Kosovo. The U.S. contingent in KFOR has been 15% or less of the entire force. Some Pentagon officials reportedly sought to reduce or end U.S. involvement in KFOR. However, the Bush Administration has made a decision that a U.S. commitment to KFOR demonstrates a U.S. desire to work with European partners to bring stability to the Balkans.¹¹

Membership and Partnership

The allies welcomed formally seven new members at the summit. Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined the alliance on March 29, 2004. Most of these governments already participate in allied operations, including in ISAF and in the Balkans. The allies stated that the door remains open to future members. Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia are candidate states for membership.

Serbia-Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina wish to join Partnership for Peace, but the allies decided that too many hurdles remain before this step can be taken. For example, in both countries, succeeding governments have not delivered suspected war criminals to the tribunal in The Hague.

At the summit, the allies did not endorse the Administration's Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative. In winter 2004, the Administration had wished to adopt a series of measures to promote democracy and human rights in a range of countries from the western Sahara to Afghanistan; however, some allies and a number of Muslim states have been reluctant to approve a program in which outside governments appeared to be instructing Middle Eastern governments on steps to reform. Some allies believe that the United States and Europe will have minimal influence on the region unless the Arab-Israeli conflict is first resolved.¹² At Istanbul, the allies instead offered cooperation to

¹⁰ See CRS Report RS21774, *Bosnia and the European Union Military Force (EUFOR): Post-NATO Peacekeeping*, by Julie Kim; interviews with U.S. officials, May 2004.

¹¹ CRS Report RL31053, *Kosovo and U.S. Policy*, by Julie Kim and Steven Woehrel; interviews with U.S. officials, May 2004.

¹² "Fine words on Arab democracy," *FT*, June 11, 2004; and CRS Report RL32342, *NATO and the European Union*, by Kristin Archick and Paul Gallis, p. 8-10; CRS Report RS22053, *The* (continued...)

some Middle Eastern countries through an “Istanbul Cooperation Initiative,” which includes programs in which NATO will assist these countries in defense and security fields.

The allies wish to enhance their partnership with the Caucasus and Central Asia. At the summit, the allies discussed a more energetic program of defense reform for these states, which are in the Partnership for Peace program.

Conclusion

The war in Iraq and its aftermath have badly strained the alliance. Some allies have cast doubt on the Administration’s leadership. Public opinion in most allied states is sharply critical of the Bush Administration. For example, shortly after September 11, 2001, the publics in Germany and France, respectively, had confidence in the United States to deal responsibly with world affairs at levels of 73% and 53%; by May 2004, those figures had dropped to 22% and 13%.¹³

Repercussions of tensions over Iraq continue to trouble the alliance. While most allied governments believe that terrorism and proliferation are serious threats, they prefer largely political measures to counter those threats. They concede that military action may occasionally be necessary, however. At the same time, they note that it will be difficult to persuade their populations to join with the United States in military operations in the near future. In part, some do not wish their forces to be associated with U.S. forces, particularly in the Muslim world, in the wake of the scandal at the Abu Ghraib prison. Some believe that a NATO operation in Iraq would taint the alliance, and could result in a loss of credibility, should the operation fail. Some also add that much has been lost in Iraq in terms of the West’s claim that its value system provides a moral example to the world. In this view, the United States until recently had provided the core of those values, and gave the world a worthy example of “the West’s” value system. They believe that these values must now be re-established, and that only judicious leadership from Washington in Iraq and elsewhere can achieve this goal.¹⁴

¹² (...continued)

Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: An Overview, by Jeremy Sharp.

¹³ U. S. State Department, Office of Research, “French and German Publics’ Trust in U.S. Falls to New Lows,” June 4, 2004.

¹⁴ Interviews, March-June 2004; Michael Lind, “How a Superpower Lost its Stature,” *FT*, June 1, 2004, p. 11.